

## Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*: a new species for Pakistan

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During the 1995-1996 winter we were conducting surveys for Western Tragopans *Tragopan melanocephalus* on behalf of BirdLife International and the Himalayan Jungle Project, in the Palas Valley, Indus Kohistan.

Between surveys we stayed in Islamabad and, in late January 1996, NB located a flock of about 15 pipits *Anthus* in the woodland behind our hotel, which was situated near Rawal Lake, Islamabad. The birds were flighty and difficult to observe but, on hearing their calls, NB concluded that they were probably Tree Pipits *A. trivialis*.

On 3 February, RD had good views of the birds when they were feeding on the ground and identified them as Olive-backed Pipits *A. hodgsoni*. The birds were identified by the combination of a relatively uniform grey-brown mantle showing an olive-green tint, bold black breast streaking, and the characteristic head pattern consisting of a contrasting supercilium (buffish in front of the eye and white behind the eye), bordered by a dark margin

above, and a striking small white patch on the rear ear-coverts, which contrasted with a black patch below it. Most of their flight calls sounded finer and weaker than those of Tree Pipit, but some sounded almost identical to the equivalent calls given by Tree Pipits. On the basis of their faintly streaked mantle and scapulars, we concluded that they were of the race *yunnanensis*. The birds stayed in the area until at least late February.

Olive-backed Pipits are common and widespread further east; *A. h. yunnanensis* breeds in southern Siberia from the Pechora river east to Kamchatka and Japan and is a common winter visitor to the Himalayas west to Simla (Himachal Pradesh). This is the first confirmed record of this species for Pakistan. The birds were photographed by NB.

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## A note on the food habits of Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* in northern Pakistan

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We performed a survey of the Sai Valley of northern Pakistan (35°45'N 74°30'E) during June 1994. This area is the confluence of the Himalayan, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush mountain ranges, with over 100 mountains reaching peak elevations of over 6,000 m, and is drained by the Indus River. The Sai Valley is just south of the main town of Gilgit. The Sai River, which flows west through the valley, empties into the Indus River at the town of Jaglot on the Karakoram Highway. Since the mountains in this area block the monsoon rains, the region is extremely arid. Little woody vegetation exists in Sai below 2,000 m, with *Juniperus macropoda* growing above this elevation, and scattered woodlands of *Pinus wallichiana* and *Picea smithiana* found between 2,400 and 3,600 m.

On 6 July, while in Sai we observed an adult Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* fly across the gorge during the day, having been disturbed by a rock displaced by a human climber. The owl flew from its roost to cliffs on the other side of the river. On 8 July we happened upon an injured owl in the same vicinity as the original roost; this was possibly the same individual we had seen earlier. This owl had probably been wounded by local villagers, as owls are disliked in this part of Pakistan. (A local insult is said to be 'You son of an owl'.)

The owl was captured and spent some time in our camp. Whilst there it regurgitated a pellet. We subsequently investigated the roost area where the owl had first been noted, on a steep cliff above the river at 2,450 m, and discovered a number of prey remains.

Analysis of the remains found near the roost indicated that the owl had recently been feeding on at least two Woolly Flying Squirrels *Eupetaurus cinereus*, as the remains included four femora, three tibias, and two complete or almost complete tails. This nocturnal cliff dweller is the largest squirrel in the world, reaching about 1-1.2 m in total length (Zahler 1996). Also found at the site was the left hind foot of an adult Brown Hare *Lepus capensis*. Analysis of the pellet showed remains of a young hare.

Little is known of the Eurasian Eagle Owl in the Western Himalayas (Roberts 1991, Voous 1988), and our observations help to fill some of the gaps in knowledge concerning this species in this part of the world. We detected no other evidence of this species of owl in four summers of field work in northern Pakistan, and local villagers are unanimous in stating that the owl is uncommon in the area.

Unfortunately, Sai and its neighbouring valleys are under extreme pressure from logging operations.

Deforestation will probably completely eliminate conifers from these valleys within 10 years. This activity, combined with overgrazing that is also having a strong negative effect on vegetation in these mountains, will undoubtedly have an effect on the Eurasian Eagle Owl and its prey base.

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# Vinous-breasted Starling *Sturnus burmannicus*: a new species for Malaysia

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On 12 April 1993, at 17h30, we were birding along the river near the village of Kuala Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia. A large flock of mynas, feeding on the river bank and on the nearby lawns, drew our attention. On inspecting this flock, EV found a bird which he immediately recognised as a Vinous-breasted Starling *Sturnus burmannicus*. We watched this confiding bird at close range for a couple of minutes, after which it flew off with a flock of Jungle Mynas *Acridotheres fuscus*.

Its uniformly pale underparts (lacking dark throat or breast band), dark upperparts and wings with a white patch at the base of the primaries, and its whitish head and hindneck with an obvious black patch through the eye, made identification straightforward.

We were both familiar with Vinous-breasted Starling, since we had seen several in central Thailand less than two months previously.

This is apparently the first record for Malaysia, and possibly the most southern one ever. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether this bird was a genuine vagrant or an escaped cage-bird. Vinous-breasted Starling is a South-East Asian endemic, occurring in Myanmar, SW, NE, central and SE Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam (Cochinchina and South Annam), and South and Central Laos (King *et al.* 1975).

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